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Country note**

Nicaragua

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for Nicaragua for a programme of cooperation for the period 2002–2006.

The situation of children and women

1. Nicaragua has a population of 5.1 million and an annual population growth rate of 2.7 per cent; 53 per cent of the population is under 18 years of age. Nicaragua's main challenge is to overcome inequity and poverty, which affect children and women most severely. The breakdown of income distribution shows that 45 per cent of all income goes to the richest 10 per cent of the population, while only 14 per cent goes to the poorest. Nicaragua is the third poorest country in the Americas, with a per capita gross national product of $453. Poverty affects 2.3 million persons, 831,000 of whom live in extreme poverty, mainly in the Central and Atlantic regions. The relative macroeconomic stability from 1995 to 1999 has had limited effect on social development.

* E/ICEF/2001/2.
** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be presented to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2001.

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2. Nicaragua has an unsustainable debt burden, equal to nearly 48 per cent of total exports. It is eligible for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), but continual compliance with the International Monetary Fund Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility is required to gain approval. Improvements in governance, transparency, decentralization, poverty reduction and preservation of the environment should ensure this final acceptance into the HIPC. However, failure to comply with these commitments, combined with the political climate of municipal elections in 2000 and national elections in 2001, might upset the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and have an impact on the flow of international cooperation.

3. Social expenditures, as a share of the gross domestic product (GDP), increased from 1.9 per cent in 1991 to 3.7 per cent in 1997, but in absolute terms have been insufficient to guarantee universal access to basic social services. The role played by international financial cooperation has been crucial, representing 22 per cent of GDP in 1999. A significant portion of external resources has been directed to strengthening social programmes and has played a fundamental role in mitigating the effects of Hurricane Mitch, which hit the country in 1998, with an estimated cost of $1.3 billion for reconstruction of social and economic infrastructure.

4. In 1998, the National Assembly approved the Code for Children and Adolescents. The enforcement of the Code will require budget allocations, strengthening of relevant institutions, and effective inter-institutional coordination. During the decade, important progress was made to achieve 10 of the 27 World Summit for Children goals. Infant and under-five mortality rates dropped to 40 and 50 per 1,000 live births, respectively. High vaccination coverage led to the eradication of poliomyelitis and elimination of neonatal tetanus and measles. Exclusive breastfeeding increased from 11 to 29 per cent and the use of oral rehydration therapy grew to 58 per cent. Achievement of universal salt iodization is possible within the next year, and sugar is now being fortified with vitamin A.

5. Other World Summit goals were not achieved. One of every three children has some degree of chronic malnutrition and 9 per cent suffer from severe malnutrition. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) of 150 per 100,000 live births is unacceptably high. In the Atlantic region and areas difficult to access, MMR may be twice as high as the national average. Adolescent pregnancies account for one of every four births at the national level. Safe water and sanitation coverage continues to be low, particularly in rural areas and those with dispersed populations.

6. Access to early childhood development interventions is limited. Only 24 per cent of children age 3 to 6 were enrolled in pre-school programmes in 1998. An estimated 79 per cent of primary-school-age children are enrolled, with no gender difference. The quality and relevance of education are significant problems. It takes an average of 10.3 years to complete the mandatory 6 years, and only 29 per cent of children complete primary schooling. Poverty affects school participation, with many families unable to afford the direct or hidden costs. Poverty also results in child labour, which affects more than 167,000 children and adolescents.

7. One of every four households is female-headed. Family violence leads to family disintegration and a culture of violence. As yet, 36 per cent of children are not legally registered, due to administrative, legal and cultural causes. Only 5 per cent of disabled children receive appropriate support. Child and adolescent sexual exploitation, drug use and violence are emerging issues of concern. The existence of

approximately 76,000 landmines continues to be a high-risk factor for children and adolescents.

8. The presence of HIV/AIDS in all departments and the potential of its spread represent a high, latent risk. Official data show a low number of cases, giving a false sense of security. The main challenges of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)and counterparts are to improve surveillance capacity; raise awareness among decision makers to overcome denial; and support the National Programme on Sexually Transmitted Diseases/HIV/AIDS.

9. Growing environmental degradation exacerbates poverty among children and their families. Hurricane Mitch demonstrated that poverty and its interaction with the environment increase already high levels of social and environmental vulnerability. Nicaragua is also prone to, inter alia, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods and drought.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

10. The 1998 mid-term review highlighted the effectiveness of coordination among the Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international and United Nations agencies, in the achievement of 10 of the 27 World Summit goals, approval of the Code for Children and Adolescents, and development of public policies. The strengthening of these alliances is essential to secure sustainable implementation of the Code and the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and to formulate a new agenda for children and adolescents for the next decade.

11. The children's rights and gender perspective evolved from an individual programme to a crosscutting approach in all UNICEF-supported programmes. This vision, integrated into the proposed country programme, will create conditions for the promotion and fulfilment of all child rights. Coordinated work among municipalities, national institutions and NGOs became a mobilizing factor at the local level.

12. Hurricane Mitch made evident the need to establish a system for prevention and mitigation of the effects of natural disasters. The rapid and effective response, with the support of the donor community and other United Nations agencies, positioned UNICEF in a leading role. In the rehabilitation phase, the timely delivery of school supplies and the "educational bridges" (temporary primary level educational and remedial learning programmes) limited the effects of the interruption of the education process.

13. The result of several programme evaluations and self-audits suggested the need to improve project management and the use of resources. The proposed country programme includes a strong component directed to increase counterpart capacity to manage social projects.

Proposed country programme strategy

14. The proposed programme will contribute to the enhancement of a popular culture based on recognition and effective fulfilment of the rights of children, adolescents and women. Built on progress for children achieved in the past decade,

and framed within the Global Movement for Children, the programme will advocate in favour of children and women as the main beneficiaries of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The main thrust is to guarantee that all children have the opportunity to develop their skills and potential in a peaceful, equitable and respectful environment, contributing to the fulfilment of commitments and obligations of the duty bearers, as well as to the definition of a new agenda for children.

15. Programme strategies include high-level political and social advocacy, strengthening of national and municipal capacity, social communication and mobilization, and selective support to basic services and supplies. The new programme, with a rights- and results-based approach, focuses on priority aspects of the life cycle. The scope combines national and municipal interventions using UNICEF comparative advantages and accumulated experience, while mobilizing and strengthening allies and partners at all levels. The geographic targeting of interventions is based on such criteria as: the level of poverty, cost-effectiveness and the opportunity to complement other cooperation programmes. Special attention will be given to strengthen, and/or expand interventions of partners and allies working in the Atlantic region.

16. The proposed country programme will comprise three areas, as well as cross-sectoral costs. *The public policies, legislation and special protection programme* will contribute to strengthening national capacity for effective compliance with laws, public policies and national programmes for the fulfilment of women's and children's rights; and to the effective observance of the Code for Children and Adolescents. Priority interventions will include support for children in need of special protection, focusing on those affected by drug use, violence and sexual abuse; social integration of the disabled and the prevention of landmine accidents; and the right to a name and nationality. Alliances among public institutions and civil society organizations will be strengthened. Cross-sectoral interventions such as advocacy, information, social communication and mobilization initiatives at all levels will support all programme areas.

17. The *health, healthy environment and vulnerability programme* will include strengthening of national and decentralized health systems; water and sanitation services and promotion of a healthy environment; and prevention and preparedness for emergencies. The programme will support integrated care and development of children, with a strong family education focus; breastfeeding promotion; maternal mortality reduction; adolescent sexual and reproductive health; prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, in close collaboration with UNAIDS; control of micronutrient deficiencies; and social communication in nutrition. Priority will be given to increasing access to water and sanitation in rural zones. Education on hygiene and sanitation will be promoted through schools and the network of health promoters. Work related to disaster prevention and the reduction of vulnerability will be carried out in coordination with other United Nations agencies within the Common Country Assessment (CCA)/United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), which are currently being elaborated.

18. The *education and citizenship programme* will contribute to ensuring the right to quality education for all. Emphasis will be on support to implementation of the National Education Plan; *promotion of alliances and advocacy for adequate* allocation of resources to initial, pre-school and primary education; strengthening of

monitoring and evaluation initiatives; and development and dissemination of models and strategies to promote increased enrolment, inclusion and learning. To achieve these objectives, work will be done along three lines: education for all children; child labour eradication and protection of working adolescents; and education for citizenship and peace.

19. Cross-sectoral costs correspond to components that support the entire programme, including support staff and travel costs and other operational expenses. In addition, specific internal activities that strengthen the internal and partner capacity to manage social projects will be covered.

20. Special attention will be given to establishing coordination with bilateral agencies and international financial institutions. The Save the Children Alliance will be an important ally, and activities will be coordinated with other international organizations working with children, adolescents and women.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme cooperation, 2002-2006[a]

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	Regular resources	*Other resources*	*Total*
Public policies, legislation and special protection	1 080	4 000	5 080
Health, healthy environment and vulnerability	1 270	8 000	9 270
Education and citizenship	1 300	4 000	5 300
Cross-sectoral costs	1 000	2 000	3 000
Total	**4 650**	**18 000**	**22 650**

[a] These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.